

FOUNDING HEAD MASTER, Dr. THOMAS NOLAN MILLER (CBHS 1881-1883)

The founding Headmaster of CBHS was Irish-born and English-educated. In 1880 Miller was selected for the Board of Canterbury College, from a field of 22 applicants, by an English advisory board comprising: Professor Jowett (Balliol College, Oxford), Professor Seeley (Cambridge, where Miller had been a Classical Lecturer and Fellow of Queen's College), Professor Blackie (Edinburgh University), Mr A. Sidgwick (Oxford), Dr Wilson (HM of Clifton College) and Sir Walter Kenneway. Thomas Miller had enjoyed a brilliant scholastic career, being educated at the St Paul's School (London) and Trinity College (University of Cambridge) where in 1862 he took First Class Honours in the Classical tripos, which gained him his Queen's College posts before Miller started his career as an Anglican priest and then (having laicized himself in 1872) as a school-master at Haileybury Imperial Service College (Hertfordshire) and then at Uppingham School (Leicester). Miller then spent some years as senior classical master at University College School (London) and lectured at University College itself. As a philologist (student mainly of ancient Greek and Latin) Miller had travelled to Italy, France, Germany and Greece. There was a depression in England in the period in which Miller put his name forward for the Head Mastership of the remote Canterbury College Boys' High School, which offered a 10-year contract at 800 pounds per annum remuneration. The appointment was made, and Miller, his wife and sons migrated to the fledgling Canterbury Colony where he guided the first steps of the BHS with liberal, progressive educational policies, including subject-only streaming, a balanced curriculum (including practical subjects¹), and the avoidance of corporal punishment (favouring moral discipline/suasion). Miller was supported by a fellow Cantabrigian, George Hogben (chosen by the same advisory Board) as Second Master, who brought rugby to the BHS and became a strong advocate for woodwork as well as leading the new school's mathematics and science instruction. (Hogben, an MA from St Catherine's College, Cambridge, and after failing to succeed Miller as HM went on to become a noted Director of Education during the Ballance-Seddon Liberal Government).

Miller's school opened on 18 May 1881 with 4 masters and a roll of 83 fee-paying young scholars. However, the innovative Miller regime was tragically sundered by a failure of Canterbury College to outline the Head's scope of managerial delegated power and due to pronounced divergences of opinion from 'heavies' on the Canterbury College Board about Miller's non-violent disciplinary method (even though it was judged to be most effective). Frustrated by 'meddling' in what today we call management (rather than overall governance), Miller resented having his staffing decisions over-ruled by the Canterbury College Registrar, and so initiated a risky show-down and (perhaps peevishly) submitted his resignation, which was accepted with alarming promptitude by a 'bunyip aristocracy' in this colonial sheep run. Miller clearly regretted that impulsive act of over-reach and was prepared to rescind his resignation, and a highly publicized campaign for his retention extended over many columns in *The Press* for some months. It was an embarrassing *crise* which must have greatly upset

¹ The 1881 curriculum consisted of: English, Latin, Greek, French and German; Ancient and Modern History, Physical and Political Geography; Arithmetic, Mathematics, Natural Science, Natural Philosophy and Social Science, Drawing, Writing (penmanship), Class-singing, and Drill. The object of the higher classes was to prepare boys for the university matriculation examination (as per its founding mission as a school).

Canterbury College's British advisors and led to a serious drop in the CCBHS roll for some years. The Millers sailed back to the UK in 1884 and settled in Germany where Thomas researched a Ph.D in philology from Gottingen University (the UK did not recognize and grant doctoral degrees until 1919). Later Dr Miller was appointed to an Imperial Professorship at the Universite de Strasbourg (France), the first Briton to do so. Ill-health led Miller to return to London where he died on 24 June 1900. The School commissioned this memorial brass tablet and placed it in the Old School to honour a great man and inspiring educator, lost through a mixture of spiteful parochial folly and *hubris*. The Thomas Miller Literature Prize (bequeathed by his widow with one-hundred pounds capital) also honours his memory as this School's distinguished academic *Paterfamilias*.

As Ferg. Murray (MA), Old Boy (1916-20) and CBHS master, opined: **“Thomas Miller was a great gentleman whom the School was singularly fortunate in having as its first headmaster. His unique qualifications for the difficult pioneering work he was called on to perform have already been noted; and although his reign lasted only three years he laid the School's foundations firmly and well. His unfailing understanding, his sense of justice, his high ideals and gift of inspiration, stamped him as exceptional as a leader as he was brilliant as a scholar.”**² Thus the charcoal drawing and memorial plaque are hung in a place of centrality and signal honour in the refurbished Deans' Stables Museum to honour this great man and true servant of CBHS.³

[HRB]

² Fergus John Boag Murray, 'The Earliest Years', *CBHS Magazine: Jubilee Number (1881-1931)*, p.13.

³ CEB Brown claimed in 1920 erroneously that Miller became a Professor of English at Gottingen but did note that his name, “by the way, is wrongly spelt on the tablet” ('Recollections by the late Headmaster', *CBHS Magazine* No.63 [December 1920], p.13). One would have thought that the HM in charge (Brown) would have checked this before it was engraved and/or hung up! Psychologists would call this lapse a profound 'psychologic sign': of hidden (and redundant) rivalry on Balbus' part.